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JOHN KEPPEL

Guest columnist

Was KAL incident really an accident?

ESSEX, Conn. — When a Korean airliner went down a year ago with the death of all on board, the administration immediately insisted that the plane's 300-mile deviation from course had been innocent and the Soviet shoot-down was a crime against humanity.

The Soviets predictably said the airliner had been on a spy mission. There was not much room left for rational inquiry into the matter. It was not easy for anyone in the media, the public, or Congress to ask questions about inconsistencies.

By now, however, the weight of evidence indicates that Korean Air Lines' Flight 007 could not have got to Sakhalin accidentally or have flown the course it did to save fuel.

Robert W. Allardyce, a pilot qualified in the Boeing 747's navigation and inertial navigation systems, told ABC's 20-20 that for the airplane to have flown the course it did, turning in the position reports it did, the pilot would have had to enter five sets of geographic coordinates having nothing to do with the course the airliner was assigned to fly.

That involves a specific string of 40 digits. The chances of doing that by accident are 1 in 700 million.

Equally well qualified West German airmen have come to similar conclusions.

When the Korean airliner went off its course, it didn't wander just anywhere. It flew into the home of more than half of the Soviets' strategic missile-firing submarines, the importance of which has increased immensely as the USA has acquired the ability to target Soviet land-based missiles.

The missile-firing submarine fleet is only effective if it

John Keppel served in the U.S. Embassy in Moscow and in the State Department's Bureau of Intelligence and Research.

can be protected from air attack. And it was precisely the Soviet air defenses and communications connected with them that the airliner provoked into activity. Its flight was like poking a stick into a beehive. Soviet radar activity was increased, aircraft were scrambled, communications were activated.

On the night in question, the United States was in an unusually good position to register these activities, both in detail and in their interrelationship as they occurred. In a position to monitor were reconnaissance satellites, aircraft, ships, submarines, and ground stations in both Alaska and Japan.

There is certainly enough evidence suggesting that the Korean airliner went off course on purpose, not by accident, to require a careful look by a congressional committee.

Was the KAL flight coordinated with that of the U.S. reconnaissance plane that was in the area? Was it coordinated with the passes of an electronic intelligence satellite? Was its passage over Kamchatka facilitated by jamming or spoofing of Soviet radars?

These and other questions could be definitively resolved by evidence in the possession of the U.S. government. Yet the administration contends that questions about the official story are "preposterous."

Surely, it seems that responsible inquiry into the circumstances surrounding the death of hundreds of innocent passengers is being stonewalled.